Informatics Jamboree

The School of Informatics held its annual Jamboree on Friday 26th April.

The day is a social gathering for staff and their families to come along and take part in activities such as a silent disco, a tango class, a pub quiz, arts and crafts, board games. This all followed with a ceilidh in the evening. There was also a visit from alpacas who greeted us at George Square.

The Staff Pride Network had their first stall at the jamboree last year, and this year it was even bigger and brighter than before. It was extremely well attended and hopefully our message was passed across successfully.

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Filmhouse event

The Everyday Cyborgs and Humanimals event on April 14th at the Filmhouse was the first public screening of four short films exploring fears, hopes and anxieties, as well as the everyday reality, of being not-fully-human. The films were made by
local artists, creatives, and a group of young people, as part of the Animal, Mechanical and Me: The Search for Replaceable Hearts project led by Dr Gill Haddow in Science Technology and Innovation Studies at the University of Edinburgh and funded by the Wellcome Trust.

The project explores patient experiences and public reactions to using material from non-human animals or from implantable cybernetic systems to repair, replace or regenerate the human body. It seeks to bring patients’ experiences, anxieties, and wider questions around human identity and selfhood, to bear on conversations about recent developments in medical technology. The film screening was part of a more general attempt to showcase social science research at Edinburgh University to wider audiences, and to generate public awareness and debate about these issues.

We decided to wear rainbow lanyards in addition to the classic dark-blue one to promote a more inclusive public image of the University, but also to pay tribute to the LGBT+ contributions to academic thought around identity, selfhood, and embodiment, and around the figure of the cyborg in the Western cultural imaginary.

Pride Edinburgh
Pride Edinburgh is on Saturday 16th June 2018 and we have LOTS of plans! All are welcome to join us for the march, wear a Rainbow Lanyard and a University Staff Pride Network t-shirt and stay for the Queer AF cabaret.

We’ll meet at Levels Cafe, Holyrood Road from 11am in advance of the march moving off from the Scottish Parliament at 12.

We have set up an ePay link (https://bit.ly/2xrpIaz) and an order form (https://bit.ly/2xpWwRj) so you can buy a Staff Pride Network t-shirt for the march at cost price of £13.20, and we’ll send it to you internal mail. You can also collect from Central or Little France. With or without a t-shirt, feel free to wear your Rainbow Lanyard and join us to celebrate Pride and show solidarity with LGBT+ people around the world.

Once you’ve marched, applauded the speeches, visited the community fair in Teviot and Potterow and ceilidh-danced your wee heart out, SPN are proud to present a special Pride Edition of Queer AF Cabaret. Drag queen host Georgia Tasda will be joined by a selection of Edinburgh’s finest queer performers. The fun begins at 6pm in Teviot Underground. Free entry to all!

LGBT & Internationalisation
By Ali McDonald

In January along with two colleagues, I attended the Stonewall Scotland LGBT and Internationalisation Seminar, hosted by the University of Dundee. Having worked in International Student Support for over 8 years and more recently becoming a Staff Dignity and Respect Advisor, this sounded right up my street. Part of our remit in the International Student Advisory Service is to provide help and guidance to students transitioning into their lives in Edinburgh – though we currently offer a lot of cultural advice and highlight the diverseness of our ever-expanding international campus, do we explicitly offer sufficient support and advice to LGBT+ students at the pre-arrival and induction stage? This was one of numerous questions I had in my mind whilst travelling through to Dundee.

The seminar itself was really thought-provoking and had great representation from Universities throughout Scotland and Northern England. Early in the seminar, we were split into teams for a quiz. Our team sadly didn’t win however we did learn some stark facts, such as: Same sex relationships or sexual acts is illegal in 76 countries and homosexuality is punishable by death in 13 countries – scarily, this number is actually on the increase.

Through a variety of discussions and knowledge sharing between the Universities, I felt proud of the University of Edinburgh
and the work we have already done in this area. BLOGS – the LGBT+ Student Society are very active and it’s fantastic to see the LGBT+ staff network has been newly revived. The International Student Advisory Service also provides a lot of pre-arrival advice and cultural support to students, particularly highlight the diverseness of our campuses and how we promote inclusivity. There is definitely more we can do in this area and I am keen to develop this further.

We are quick to celebrate – and rightly so – how wonderfully diverse our University is, with staff and students coming here from over 135 countries. Each individual will arrive with their own set of values, beliefs and ideology. It’s important to acknowledge and appreciate an individual’s journey is not linear and with such a diverse staff and student body, it is inevitable that beliefs and values will unfortunately clash. I believe our job as representatives of the University is to encourage open, honest but most importantly accepting and understanding conversation with no judgements made. I think our biggest challenge here is with such a diverse population, how do we promote inclusivity whilst not excluding any particular group at the same time?

**In London at an LGBT conference**

It seems strange to be writing this on the morning after a terrorist attack in London. I was there in the city at the beginning of the week, attending a conference on LGBT networks in Higher Education, and now this.
London struck me as a beautiful place when I was there. I grew up in the 1980s and 90s and imagined the English capital as a place of pollution and litter. Perhaps it was, back then; I remember the ‘Keep Britain Tidy’ campaigns of my childhood in cinemas and on the back of crisp packets, as they tried to do away with the culture of casual littering. But walking through London this past week, I understood why people flock to it. That windswept, asphalt smell that hits you on the Underground of a million stations, then in daylight, the sense of something prestigious, at least in the Temple district, of people who inhabit another world, a private school world, glamorous and utterly beyond me, a Wimbledon world of privilege. Then through the high streets, striding behind the guy I was with from Edinburgh, a small suitcase in tow, feeling vaguely important in my business suit and heels as a six-foot transwoman PA, passing men and women in their business suits.

The photo shows me in profile and in discussion after the conference had finished, and some of us had gathered in a London pub to network. You can see me talking with Isabella, while staring morosely into the lens is Andy. Isabella said some really nice things to me about how I looked. When I got back to Edinburgh with the guy I was with, Jonathan, he asked me for my reflections on the conference. ‘The woman, Isabella, said nice things to me, and London was nice,’ was my reply. He must have been wondering why our LGBT network had bothered to pay for me to come along, but actually there was something I remember from one of the speakers, and it’s this:

People perform better when they can be themselves.

Yes, I think so too. I was a terrible student in my younger days, and it’s costing me now. Now, I am the kind of student who can get distinctions, but ‘way back when’, before I was out as transgender, I applied myself to all things like a zombie. I simply switched off and escaped, into Ealing comedies on a bedroom TV or in unreal fantasies of myself in
an imagined America.

So now, when I apply for funding, I can’t get it, because people see my record from the past and immediately dismiss my application, regardless of the impact I talk about making, or the performance I’m now capable of scoring. I wish there was a greater understanding with funding bodies and with the HR departments of Edinburgh University, who think it’s a level playing field, but I’m not sure it is, not if you were once someone who couldn’t engage with the world, and was accordingly a mediocrity.

I wonder how I can contribute in changing that for future generations, but in the meantime, the London conference was useful to me in consolidating this sense of unevenness I have, concerning the opportunities out there, for trans people but also for anyone else weighted down by a past that once zombified them from any discernible achievement.

To conclude: I went down to London and enjoyed its magic, and picked up breadcrumbs of useful ideas, which may not be breadcrumbs but seeds. And London was a shining, happy place to be, and I wonder why those terrorists did what they did, what was this cause they decided to kill for, and die for, with their foot-long knives and fake suicide belts.

Article by Gina Maya

Taken from her blog: https://www.ginamaya.co.uk/transgender-life/in-london-at-an-lgbt-conference.html